



National History Day in North Carolina

Teacher Toolkit:

Suggestions for Implementing and
Improving Your History Day Program

NHD Classroom Calendar

(Adapted from National History Day calendar at <http://www.nhd.org/TeacherGettingStarted.htm>)

In the Summer

- Download the theme book and sample topics from www.nhd.org/annualtheme.htm. You can also download sample NC topics that relate to the theme at <http://www.ncdcr.gov/historyday/Themes.aspx>.
- Read and understand the theme.
- Peruse the class textbook/class curriculum making note of possible student research topics.
- Set a calendar of assignments and due dates corresponding with each grading period.

August and September

- Introduce the theme.
- Show how the theme fits into the class curriculum.
- Explain primary and secondary sources.
- Develop a paperwork management system.

September and October

- Support students in choosing a topic.
- Help students decide if their project will be done individually or as a group.
- Guide students in reading a variety of quality sources.
- Help students narrow and ask questions of the topic (e.g. Can I do the topic in the amount of time allotted? Are there enough resources to support a research project on this topic?).

October, November and December

- Encourage students to read, read, read.
- Students need to begin analyzing sources.
- Help students develop a thesis.
- Explain formulating an interpretation and presenting research.

December and January

- Introduce the possible methods of presentation: Web site, Performance, Exhibit, Documentary, or Paper and support students in being good decision makers.
- Students begin creating draft projects and receiving feedback.

February, March, April

- NHD competition cycle starts, for students participating in a contest. Schools may have contests in January or February to determine which students will move on to the district contest; district contests take place in March and early April; and the state contest occurs the last Saturday in April.

***Note:** Teachers who are on block scheduling (teaching different subjects in longer blocks each semester) may need to shorten the calendar by condensing the activities to fit within one semester. Alternatively, some teachers may be able to continue supervising NHD projects after the end of the semester in sessions outside of class; others could team with teachers in different subjects to continue work on NHD projects. English teachers may be able to help students with writing the process paper or creating an annotated bibliography, while arts teachers may be able to offer advice on exhibit design, performances, etc.

Suggestions for Starting Your History Day Program

How to Get Started

North Carolina is divided into six NHD districts; get in touch with your district coordinator to let him or her know you are interested in the program. (You can find your coordinator by visiting www.ncdcr.gov/historyday and going to the “Districts” tab or by looking at the “District Contest” pages later in this Toolkit.) The district coordinator can share resources and, if you would like your students to compete, can stay in touch with you about registering students for the district contest. The coordinator will also be able to tell you how many projects from your school can advance to the district contest. The district coordinator, or the state coordinator, may also be able to visit your school to talk to your students or to your fellow teachers about NHD.

Begin by reviewing the theme and sharing with students some of the suggested topics in the sources provided, but encourage them to think beyond those to other topics that interest them as well. They may also be thinking about whether to work alone or in a group. Assign a date by which they must tell you their group members.

Sample assignments:

- By x date: They must have chosen two or three topics of interest and done preliminary research on the topics in secondary sources.
- By x date: Have them narrow down the topic and turn in a list of x number of sources they have identified about their topic, including some primary sources.*
- By x date: Turn in a thesis statement. They can continue to look for pertinent sources.
- By x date: Turn in a draft annotated bibliography.
- By x date: Turn in an outline of the project telling in which category they will compete, what the main points of their project are, and how it will be organized.
- By x date: Have a first draft of the project, with process paper and bibliography.
- By x date: Have a completed project.

*Some teachers give students the option of being competitive or not. Those who will compete must have a certain number of sources and must relate their topic to the theme; those who will not may be required to have fewer sources and do not have to strictly adhere to the theme.

Some teachers doing NHD for the first time limit the type of categories in which students can create a project; for instance, rather than give their students the option of competing in any of the five categories (paper, exhibit, documentary, performance, and website), teachers may give students the option of creating either an exhibit or a research paper. Over time, as the teacher becomes more comfortable, the teacher may allow students to create a project in any category.

Engage Parents and the Community

To inform parents about the program, schedule an informational meeting. Explain to them the long-term benefits their students will reap from participating in the History Day program. The research, analytical, critical thinking, and presentation skills that they will acquire by doing the project will give them a leg up when they get to college. These are also skills that adults need to be successful in the work force. You might also consider having a day or evening when students can show off their projects at school. Invite parents and others who may be interested to see what the students have accomplished. Approach businesses, malls, civic clubs, or historical organizations about displaying some of the student projects in the community.

Other Resources

Be sure to visit the National History Day website

(www.nhd.org) for updates, tips for teachers and students, and new information. In the fall, the national office will post information about upcoming question-and-answer sessions through which students and teachers can ask questions about the annual theme and about the contest in general.



- At www.nhd.org/ClassroomConnection.htm, teachers click on the links in the left margin to find eight steps to historical research and teacher resources, including sample handouts developed by teachers using NHD in their classrooms.
- At www.nhd.org/Contest.htm, students can find information about getting started, conducting research, and creating an entry.
- Students and teachers will also be interested in seeing **sample projects** that are available on the national website at <http://www.nhd.org/StudentProjectExamples.htm>.
- The annual theme and suggested topics can be found at www.nhd.org/AnnualTheme.htm and the rule book can be found at www.nhd.org/rules.htm.
- The national office of National History Day offers useful books for sale on such topics as how to create an exhibit, website, documentary, research paper, and performance as well as a book designed specifically to help teachers use National History Day in the classroom. *A Guide to Historical Research Through the National History Day Program* was written by a team of ten veteran NHD teachers who provide their best practices in supporting student research. The book is formatted to take teachers step-by-step through a school year, from topic selection to research presentation. More information can be found by going to www.nhd.org and clicking on “Store” (<http://www.nhd.org/cart>).

The NHD in North Carolina website (www.ncdcr.gov/historyday) also has useful resources, including dates of the district and state competitions; contact information for the district and state coordinators; tips for students; ideas for North Carolina topics that relate to the annual theme; and more. In particular, an online PowerPoint presentation, available at www.ncdcr.gov/historyday/Presentations.aspx, outlines the fundamentals of a good NHD project. The state coordinator and some district coordinators are willing to come to your school to speak to you and your fellow teachers or to speak to your students about National History Day. Please don't hesitate to contact a coordinator and ask for help. **If you would like to correspond with an experienced NHD teacher** from North Carolina to share ideas or ask questions, please contact the state coordinator at Laura.Ketcham@ncdcr.gov. She may be able to send you contact information for a veteran teacher.

You may also enjoy visiting NHD websites offered by other states. The Maryland History Day program, for instance, offers a detailed teacher guide at <http://www.mdhc.org/pdf/TeacherGuide0705.pdf>. The National History Day in Wisconsin program also has useful information (at <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/teachers/historyday/>).

National History Day in North Carolina 2015 District Contests

If you would like your students to enter their projects into a district competition, you must get in touch with your district coordinator to find out how many projects from your school can be accepted into the district contest and how to register your students. North Carolina has six district contests; please find your county listed under one of the six districts and get in touch with that district coordinator for more information.

Western District

Coordinator: **Jeff Futch**
Western Office of Archives and History
176 Riceville Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-296-7230 x222
jeff.futch@ncdcr.gov

Competition Date: **March 21, 2015**

Counties in Western District:

Buncombe	Macon
Cherokee	Madison
Clay	Mitchell
Graham	Polk
Haywood	Rutherford
Henderson	Swain
Jackson	Transylvania
McDowell	Yancey

Central Piedmont District

Coordinator: **Dr. Benjamin Filene**
Director of Public History/Assoc. Professor
History Department
University of North Carolina-Greensboro
336-334-5645
bpfilene@uncg.edu

Competition Date: **March 21, 2015**

Counties in Central Piedmont District:

Alamance	Guilford	Person
Caswell	Harnett	Randolph
Chatham	Hoke	Rockingham
Cumberland	Johnston	Vance
Durham	Lee	Wake
Franklin	Moore	Warren
Granville	Orange	

Northwest Piedmont District

Coordinator: **Richard Shelton**
Surry Community College
630 South Main Street
Dobson, NC 27017
sheltonr@surry.edu

(336) 386-3236

Competition Date: **March 20, 2015**

Counties in NW Piedmont District:

Alexander	Forsyth
Alleghany	Iredell
Ashe	Rowan
Avery	Stokes
Burke	Surry
Caldwell	Watauga
Catawba	Wilkes
Davidson	Yadkin
Davie	

Northeast District

Coordinator: **Dr. Chad Ross**
A 309 Brewster Building
East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858
ROSSCH@ecu.edu

(252) 328-6089

Competition Date: **April 2, 2015 (Tentative)**

Counties in NE District:

Beaufort	Halifax	Pitt
Bertie	Hertford	Perquimans
Camden	Hyde	Pitt
Carteret	Jones	Tyrrell
Chowan	Lenoir	Washington
Craven	Martin	Wayne
Currituck	Nash	Wilson
Dare	Northampton	
Edgecombe	Pamlico	
Gates	Pasquotank	
Greene	Perquimans	

National History Day in North Carolina

District Contests

(continued)

Southeast District

Through November

Coordinator: Pepper Hill

Cape Fear Museum

814 Market Street

Wilmington, NC 28401-4731

Phone: (910) 798-4386

phill@nhcgov.com

After November:

Coordinator: **Amy Thornton**

Cape Fear Museum

814 Market Street

Wilmington, NC 28401-4731

Phone: 910-798-4355

athornton@nhcgov.com

*Competition Date: **March 25, 2015***

Counties in SE District:

<i>Bladen</i>	<i>Onslow</i>
<i>Brunswick</i>	<i>Pender</i>
<i>Columbus</i>	<i>Robeson</i>
<i>Duplin</i>	<i>Sampson</i>
<i>New Hanover</i>	

Southwest Piedmont District

Coordinator: **Dr. Victor B. Mack**

Office of Educational Outreach

162 College of Educ. Bldg, UNC-Charlotte

9201 University City Blvd.

Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

(704) 687-8801

vbmack@uncc.edu

*Competition Date: **February 20, 2015***

Counties in SW Piedmont

<i>Anson</i>	<i>Montgomery</i>
<i>Cabarrus</i>	<i>Richmond</i>
<i>Cleveland</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Gaston</i>	<i>Stanly</i>
<i>Lincoln</i>	<i>Union</i>
<i>Mecklenburg</i>	

Finalists from the district contests will advance to the state contest.



State Contest

N.C. Museum of History, Raleigh, NC

Coordinator: **Laura Ketcham**

(919) 807-7395

laura.ketcham@ncdcr.gov

Saturday, April 25, 2015

Outline of History Day Guide for Teachers

(from New York State History Day <http://ny.nhd.org/StepbyStepGuide.htm>)

Step 1: Introduce History Day

Key Goals:

- Provide an overview of the History Day program
- Introduce key learning themes and goals
- Familiarize students with the program rules and guidelines

Step 2: Choosing Topics

Key Goals

- Topics must relate to the Annual Theme
- Topics should be broad enough to find good research, but narrow enough to have a focus
- Topics should demonstrate a larger historical impact

Strategies

- Start from what you are studying
- Build on previous studies
- Brainstorm with students
- Share suggested topic lists
- Topics should be student selected
- You can set topic parameters to fit with your curriculum
- Have students break down larger subjects

Step 3: Choosing Projects

Key Goals

- Explore the project categories with students using the NHD Contest Rule Books and other resources:

- o Exhibits
- o Papers
- o Documentaries
- o Performances
- o Web Sites

- Help students pick the category that best meets their skill level and fits with the topic

Strategies

- Be sure the topic fits the category:
 - o Exhibits, web sites, documentaries need graphics
 - o Performances need real direction
 - o Papers require written skills
 - o Web Sites require computer skills
- Individual or Group Projects?
 - o Stick to your comfort level
 - o Consider who your students are

- o Look at what the research says: “In 67 studies of the achievement effects of cooperative learning, 61% found significantly greater achievement in cooperative groups than in traditionally taught control groups. Positive effects were found in all major subjects at all grade levels, in urban, rural, and suburban schools, and for high, average, and low achievers (Slavin, 1991).”
- o For best results, groups should be no more than 3 students . [Please note: National History Day does allow up to 5 students per group.]
- o Each member should have clear cut responsibilities
- o Evaluate group behavior and participation
- o Consider the differing abilities of group members
- o Consider using learning contracts for meeting expectations

Step 4: Research and Analysis

Key Goals:

- Research and analysis are the most important parts of the History Day program
- Help students to:
 - o ascertain the difference between primary and secondary sources
 - o become familiar with source materials available at local libraries, museums, and archives
 - o develop the organization skills needed to conduct effective research and to create annotated bibliographies
 - o learn how to identify the main idea from historic readings
 - o identify a thesis statement and work to create their own arguments based on their historical research

Strategies

- Start with secondary sources, then move students to primary sources
- Teach note taking skills to ensure students keep track of their sources
- Provide in-class time with teacher guidance
- Evaluate research along the way
- Involve media specialists and language arts teachers
- Reach out to parents to assist in student travel
- Visit large libraries, archives, museums, historical sites as a class when possible
- Encourage students to conduct personal interviews in person, on the telephone or over email

Step 5: Creating Projects

Key Goals:

- Once their research is complete, and the students have a clearly identified thesis statement and supporting evidence, they can create their projects
- Students also must write a 500 word Process Paper that summarizes their entire experience with the program. [Please note: Students writing a research paper are not required to write a process paper; only students creating a website, exhibit, performance, or documentary must create a process paper.]

Strategies

- Students must be clear on requirements prior to starting. They should consult the NHD Contest Rule Book often while creating their projects
- Post the category requirements around the room for easy reference

- All students should have a complete planning document or rough draft before starting to create their final project
- Students will try to create before they ever research. You must be strong; don't allow students to proceed with production until planning is complete
- Allow some in class time for students to work
- Be sure and spend some time going over basic design principles
- Share examples of student projects
- Do periodic checks of student work
- Have students complete weekly planners that outline their progress

Step 6: Competition

Key Goals:

- Students may choose to enter their project in History Day competition
- Help students understand the structure and process of competing at a History Day contest
- Competition can start at the school level and continues up to a national level

Strategies

- Review the contest structure and process
- Review the judging criteria
- Practice the judging process using evaluation forms and sample judging questions
- Identify the characteristics of good sportsmanship

Step 7: Evaluation

Key Goals:

- Students should be evaluated on their work habits, including (but not limited to):
 - o Using time effectively
 - o Showing good time management
 - o Respecting others
 - o Keeping areas clean
 - o Using quality resources

Strategies

- Evaluation should be an ongoing process
- Make evaluation a part of the classroom structure
- Evaluations help lay the ground work for future student success

Conducting Research: Primary and Secondary Sources

In order to be successful, students must use both **primary** and **secondary sources**. Make sure that your students understand the difference between the two. Here are definitions you may share with them.

- **Primary sources** are ones that were created or in use during the period being studied. They may include diaries, maps, photographs, music, artifacts, newspaper articles from the period, government documents, interviews with people who lived through the time period being studied, historic sites, and more. Primary sources are important, because they provide the researcher with the opportunity to evaluate and interpret the materials themselves.

Note: Primary materials such as quotations from historical figures or photographs of historical events can be found in secondary sources, and students may certainly make use of those materials. However, those sources would not be considered primary. The sources should be listed as a secondary source, but students can use their annotations to indicate that the source made use of primary materials.



Photographs can be primary sources.

- **Secondary sources** are materials not related to the topic by time or participation. They may include such sources as textbooks, biographies, scholarly history books, interviews with scholars, documentaries, or current magazine or newspaper articles. Secondary sources are usually created decades, if not centuries, after the time period being studied by people who did not live through or participate in the event or issue. Secondary sources are important because they provide background information and context. They make use of primary sources, and by looking in their bibliographies students can often find ideas of primary sources they can consult.

Discovering the Variety of Sources Available

One good exercise to help students understand the difference between primary and secondary sources—and to help them think broadly about what kinds of sources exist—is to do the following activity: **Ask students to imagine that the year is 2060**, and a historian is going to write a biography about their life. Ask them to write down anything the historian could use to find information about them. What sources could the historian use?

Help students brainstorm, then have them share their ideas. Sample responses might include yearbooks; newspaper articles; birth certificates; interviews with the students themselves and/or people who knew them; report cards; a diary or journal; photographs; videos; sound recordings; letters or emails; social media postings (like Facebook); even an autobiography. If a student were to become famous, perhaps there would be biographies, documentaries, or websites about them, or scholars who studied them. Discuss with students which items they listed would be primary sources, and which would be secondary sources. Now talk about a historical person or topic and ask students to brainstorm possible sources for learning more about that person or topic.

Suggestions for Helping Students Improve Bibliographies

1. **Do a primary source exercise in your classroom** on a regular basis. Possible sources of short primary source exercises include:
 - State Library of North Carolina (http://ncgovdocs.org/educator_resources.htm)
 - NC History Day (<http://www.ncdcr.gov/historyday/Lounge.aspx>)
 - State Archives of North Carolina (www.ncdcr.gov/archives/Educators/ResourcesAndToolsForEducation.aspx)
 - Learn NC (www.learnnc.org/lessons).
 - Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/teachers)
 - National Archives (www.archives.gov/education)
2. **Organize a field trip to a library or archives.** Make arrangements with the librarian or archivist in advance of the trip and, if possible, provide a list of topics to them in advance. This will help them better plan how to direct the students toward sources. Or assign students to make a visit on their own.
3. **Encourage students to identify at least one person to interview** for their project. Oral history interviews can be a primary source (if the person experienced an event or lived through that time period) or secondary sources (for instance, if the person is a scholar who has studied a topic but did not experience it). Interviews can be done in person or by email, phone, or mail. Have students create a list of questions before they make the contact, so they are prepared if the person is ready to answer the questions immediately. Students may need help in developing questions that will generate answers that help them analyze the significance of the event rather than just gather facts. See guidelines for students on the following page.
4. As you teach about particular periods of history, **introduce music from the time period.** Help students understand that period music can not only set the tone for a project, it may also be a primary source.





Guidelines for Personal Interviews

The first questions should gather the facts you need for your bibliography: person's name, year of birth, where s/he lived during the period you are asking about. Or if you are talking to an expert, find out what qualifies him/her as an expert: educational background, profession, research done on the topic.

Question Formats

The way you ask a question may determine the kind of answer you get. Do not ask questions that can be answered with one word.

Not-So-Good Questions

Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor being bombed?

Did you serve in World War II?

Did you participate in rationing?

Better Questions

Describe where you were and how you felt when you heard about Pearl Harbor being bombed.

Tell me about your service in World War II.

Can you tell me how rationing worked during the war?

Begin questions with words like:

Explain...

Describe...

Tell me about...

What do you remember about...

Could you give me more information about...

Avoid asking leading questions that suggest a particular answer or encourage the interviewee to answer in a certain way.

Not-So-Good Questions

I guess you were really poor during the Depression.

I understand that everyone loved FDR.

Better Questions

Describe what your family life was like during the Depression.

What do you remember about people's attitudes toward President Roosevelt and his programs?

Gathering and Recording Information



To be responsible researchers, students must credit sources from which they gathered information. To begin the process, however, it is important for the student to collect the critical information from each source as they read: the author's name, title, publisher, and date of publication, and page number for quotes.

Citations/bibliographies

To record the information the two acceptable styles of writing for NHD projects are Turabian and MLA. Historians use Turabian but we know that many classes in middle school and high school teach the MLA style. It does not matter which of these two styles the student uses, but it is important to be consistent. For help with questions about citations, you can check Turabian or MLA guides from your local library.

For help with Turabian: <http://www.libs.uga.edu/ref/turabian.html>

For help with MLA: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/mla>

Annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography is required for all categories. The annotations for each source must explain how the source was used and how it helped the student understand the topic. The student should also use the annotation to explain why the source was categorized as primary or secondary. Historians do sometimes disagree and there's not always one right answer, so students should use the annotation to explain why they classified their sources as they did. Students should list only those sources used to develop their entry. An annotation normally should be about 1-3 sentences.

- **Source** (example)
Bates, Daisy. *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*. 1st ed. New York: David McKay Co. Inc., 1962.
- **Annotation** (example)
Daisy Bates was the president of the Arkansas NAACP and the one who met and listened to the students each day. This first-hand account was very important to my paper because it made me more aware of the feelings of the people involved.

Process Paper

All categories (except for research papers) must have a process paper. A process paper is a description of no more than 500 words explaining how students conducted their research and created and developed their entry. Students must conclude their description with an explanation of the relationship of their topic to the contest theme.

The first section should explain how students chose their topic.

The second section should explain how students conducted their research.

The third section should explain how students selected their presentation category and created their project.

The fourth section should explain how the project relates to the NHD theme.

Mini-Lesson: The Ever-Changing Thesis Statement

Students can be observant critics of their own work. Give them a chance to provide critical—yet constructive—feedback in class.

Exercise 1

Have students write a first draft of their thesis statement on transparencies or note cards and turn them in.

Project pages on the screen and work together as a class to evaluate. Is the thesis specific enough? Does it address the topic's significance in history? Can you see the theme connection?

As the class works to evaluate the thesis statements, give students an opportunity to rethink and rewrite their own. Students will learn the important lesson that their thesis is not written in stone! They will change and evolve as their research and interpretations change.

Exercise 2

GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY: COMPARING THESIS STATEMENTS

Sharing thesis statements with students—both good and bad—can help them understand the characteristics they should be striving for in their own work. Share the thesis statements provided on the following page with your students on the chalkboard or overhead. Ask them to brainstorm possible problems or positive characteristics of each. Keep in mind that even the “Best” statements are a work in progress.

	Needs Improvement	Better	Good
Susan B. Anthony Theme: Turning Points in History	<p>Why was Susan B. Anthony so important in history?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This is a question, not a statement. -Lacks the author's opinion. What are you trying to prove? -Needs to be more specific about her impact on history. -Needs a connection to the theme. 	<p>Susan B. Anthony fought for the right to vote. The 19th amendment was passed in 1919.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Needs to do more than state a fact. -Needs more information about Anthony's role and the significance in history. -Needs theme connection 	<p>Through social action and her writings, Susan B. Anthony worked for passage of the 19th amendment, resulting in the right for women to vote and laying the foundation for their full participation in the political process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discusses significance in history. -Specific about means and ends. -Relates to the theme by showing how Anthony contributed to a turning point.
Martin Luther Theme: Taking a Stand in History	<p>Martin Luther was born in 1483. He started the Reformation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Needs to do more than state a fact. -Needs theme connection. -So what? Needs to discuss importance in history. 	<p>Despite opposition, Luther used his 95 theses to take a stand against the Roman Catholic Church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -So what? Needs to discuss the significance of this in history. 	<p>Through his 95 theses, Martin Luther took a stand against certain religious practices of the Roman Catholic Church which resulted in a new sect of faith and led to later reforms in the Catholic Church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discusses significance in history. -Has a connection to the theme.
Chemical Warfare Theme: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History	<p>The use of chemical warfare during World War I was wrong.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Needs to do more than just state an opinion. -Needs a theme connection. 	<p>The introduction of chemical warfare during World War I was a revolution in warfare. It prompted countries to use new tactics and develop new equipment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Connects to the theme. -Could move beyond just new technology—what are some of the more significant impacts of this topic? 	<p>The use of chlorine gas at Ypres in 1915 by the German Empire represented a revolution in modern warfare, prompting reforms in the use of chemical warfare through the Geneva Protocol.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Has a theme connection. -Discusses impact in history.
The Speaker Ban Law Theme: Rights and Responsibilities in History	<p>The Cold War caused people's rights to be violated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This relates to the theme, but the topic is too broad and too general -Does not explain significance in History 	<p>During the Cold War North Carolina passed the Speaker Ban Law to curb the spread of communism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Still lacks good explanation of significance in history. -No good connection to the theme. 	<p>As a reaction to the threat of Communism, North Carolina passed the Speaker Ban Law, causing the courts to examine the balance between the government's responsibility to protect national security and the constitutional rights of individuals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -States the significance of the event in history. -Connects to topic to the theme.

Student Worksheet for Thesis Development

National History Day projects should do more than just tell a story. Every exhibit, performance, documentary, web site, and paper should make a point about its topic. To do this in your project, you will need to develop your own argument about the historical impact of the person, event, or idea you are studying. The point you make could also be called a thesis statement. A thesis statement is not the same as a topic. Your thesis statement expresses your opinion about the impact and significance of your topic. Researchers start out with a topic and a research question, but they usually don't have a thesis statement right away. Instead, they develop their thesis over time as they learn more about their topic and make judgments about the evidence they find. A good thesis statement does three things:

- Addresses a narrow topic
- Expresses an opinion
- Evaluates significance

For a demonstration, check out the building of the thesis statement below.

Step 1: "The Civil War in North Carolina."

This is not a thesis statement yet because it doesn't address a specific, narrow issue related to the Civil War in North Carolina. What will the project examine? The secession movement? North Carolina as a battlefield? The blockade? There are many topics that a historian could research about North Carolina in the Civil War. This topic needs to be narrowed quite a bit before it can be used to build a thesis.

Step 2: "Fort Fisher and Blockade Running in North Carolina during the Civil War"

This is a nice and narrow topic, but it's still not a thesis. This phrase expresses no opinion and makes no argument about the significance of Fort Fisher and the blockade.

Step 3: "The Fall of Fort Fisher was a severe blow to the Confederacy."

This sentence is close to a thesis statement, but it isn't quite there yet. The researcher now shows an opinion about the result of the fall of Fort Fisher, but still doesn't tell us why the topic is significant in history. Why was Fort Fisher tied to the blockade? How did the loss of Fort Fisher affect the overall outcome of the war?

Step 4: "As the last open port of the Confederacy, the Fall of Fort Fisher ended the South's ability to import needed goods through the Union blockade, assuring a Union victory in the war."

We have a winner! This thesis looks at a narrow topic, expresses an opinion, and evaluates the significance of the topic. A History Day project based on this thesis statement would discuss the important role of Fort Fisher in the South's ability to run the blockade and the significance of its loss at the end of the war.

Testing Your Thesis

A thesis statement expresses an informed opinion. To test the strength of your thesis, think about what an opposing opinion might be. If someone could argue that your topic is not significant in history, or that it is significant for a different reason, how would you argue against their interpretation? Why is your view stronger?

To visualize and organize your ideas, try drawing a chart like this one on a piece of paper. Now consider the strength of each argument. Do you need more evidence to support your thesis statement? How will you deal with evidence that supports opposing arguments? Thinking about questions like these can help you decide what the next step in your research process should be.

My thesis:
Opposing Arguments:
Evidence that supports my argument:
Evidence that supports opposing arguments:
Which argument is strongest? Why?

Questions to Help Students Evaluate Their NHD Project

1. **Have I chosen the right category?** Students should answer two main questions before deciding on a category. Does the topic lend itself to a particular category? Some topics will not fit well in a category. For instance, documentaries need a number of illustrations to be effective. A topic such as the Roman Legion may be difficult to find the illustrations needed for a successful documentary. 2) Does the student have strengths in a particular category? Student should choose a category that plays to their strengths. For example, students will often choose exhibits, because they think it will be easy. In fact, exhibits are one of the more difficult categories to do well. It can be a challenge to tell the story in 500 words, and students need some design talent to be able to plan and execute an attractive and effective board.
2. **Is my topic too recent?** It often takes years before we can fully understand the historical significance of an event. Events that are still in the process of developing and topics about which little historical study has been done should be avoided. National History Day generally recommends that students *avoid* studying topics that occurred in the last 20 to 25 years.
3. **Do I have a clear thesis statement?** Every project should have a thesis statement near the beginning of the project that clearly but succinctly states what the significance of the historical event is. The project should then prove the statement.
4. **Do I support and prove my thesis?** All information in the project should be for the purpose of supporting and proving the thesis. For instance, students sometimes include a lot of biographical information that does not directly address the thesis.
5. **Have I examined a variety of resources?** While the internet has many good sources, judges at every level will want to see that students extended their research beyond the internet. Visiting libraries, museums, and historic sites, watching documentaries or movies, and talking to others with knowledge of the topic will greatly increase the chances of success for the project.
6. **Is my project analytical, not just narrative?** Students should not simply relate facts of the events but should explain why the event is significant in history.
7. **Have I demonstrated significance in history?** In order for something to have significance in history, it must demonstrate change over time. The project should include a description of the situation before the event, the event itself, and how things were different after the event.
8. **Have I divided the bibliography into primary and secondary sources?** This rule is included so the judges can determine that students really do understand the difference between primary and secondary sources. Students need to comply with the rule.
9. **Have I annotated the bibliography?** Annotations help students think about what was truly useful in a particular source and help judges determine that students have used sources effectively. Students will be penalized for failure to annotate their bibliographies.
10. **Do I understand the rules of the category?** Students should read and re-read category rules. The higher the level of competition, the more rule violations will count off.
11. **Do I have a strong connection to the theme?** Projects should demonstrate a connection to the theme throughout the project, not just in the opening paragraph.

12. **Do I provide enough context?** Every historical event is a result of the events that preceded it. Students should provide sufficient historical context to understand the impetus for their project.
13. **Is my project balanced?** Students must demonstrate that they know there are differing perspectives on issues; while students should decide what they believe to be correct, they should also briefly refer to differing viewpoints.
14. **Have I used all the time and space allotted for my project?** Take advantage of the amount of space or the length of time that the category rules allow. A six-foot exhibit has a lot more space to describe an event than does a four-foot exhibit; likewise a 10-minute documentary or performance will be more informative than a 6-minute one.
15. **Have I included all pertinent information in the project?** Students are often very knowledgeable about their topic but fail to demonstrate it in the project itself. All essential information must be in the project, not just in the student's head. A viewer should be able to fully understand the significance of the project without any explanation from the creator(s).
16. **Does my project have any grammatical and typographical errors?** Proofread your project, process paper, and bibliography several times, and ask others to proofread them as well. Your teacher may be able to help you proofread as well.

Judging Criteria



The following is a set of guidelines used in judging all categories of entries in the National History Day competition. These guidelines are taken from the National History Day Contest Rule Book.

Historical Quality (60%)

The most important aspect of an entry is its *historical quality*. The following questions help focus on the historical analysis:

- Is the entry historically accurate?
- Does the entry provide analysis and interpretation of the historical data in addition to an accurate description?
- Does the entry demonstrate an understanding of the historical context?
- Does the annotated bibliography demonstrate wide research?
- Does the entry demonstrate a balanced presentation of materials?
- Does the entry demonstrate the use of available primary sources?

Relation to Theme (20%)

Projects must show a clear relationship to the annual theme and demonstrate the significance of the topic in history and draw conclusions. The following questions help focus on relation to theme:

- How does the topic relate to the theme? Why is the topic important?
- How is the topic significant in history and in relation to the History Day theme?
- How did the topic influence history?
- How did the events and atmosphere (social, economic, political, and cultural aspects) of my topic's time period influence the topic in history?

Clarity of Presentation (20%)

Although historical quality is most important, entries must be presented in an effective manner. The following questions help focus on *clarity of presentation*:

- Is the entry original, creative, well organized, and imaginative in subject and presentation?
- Is the entry effective in communicating the significance of the topic?
- Is the written material clear, grammatical, and correctly spelled?
- In a performance, do the students display stage presence?
- Is the visual material clear and appropriate for the type of entry?
- Do the students display adequate familiarity with their equipment?


Rule Compliance

Judges will take into consideration in their final rankings any rule infraction. Failure to comply with the rules will count against your entry. Rule infractions should be corrected before a winning entry competes in the next level of competition.

Sample Judging Form

National History Day has developed assessments that can be used to structure and monitor student learning and research projects. [Click here](#) to download these evaluation sheets. Each one can be subdivided into specific skills that can then be used to establish grades.

Below is a sample judging form for exhibits. Note that the section on “Clarity of Presentation” and “Rule Compliance” are specific to exhibits; other categories (website, documentary, paper, and performance) have different requirements.

	EXHIBIT
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JUDGING CRITERIA <small>(Judging criteria are explained in the <i>Rule Book</i>)</small>	EVALUATION			
	SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
Historical Quality (60%)				
• Entry is historically accurate				
• Shows analysis and interpretation				
• Places topic in historical context				
• Shows wide research				
• Uses available primary sources				
• Research is balanced				
Relation to Theme (20%)				
• Clearly relates topic to theme				
• Demonstrates significance of topic in history and draws conclusions				
Clarity of Presentation (20%)				
• Exhibit, written material is original, clear, appropriate and organized				
• Exhibit is organized, has visual impact, correctly uses maps, photos, etc.				
Rules Compliance	Yes	No		
• Maintains size requirement (40" x 30" x 72")				
• Media device maintains time limit (3 minutes)				
• Maintains word limit (500 words)				
• Includes annotated bibliography				
• Other				

COMMENTS

• Strengths • Areas for Improvement

Selected North Carolina Standards that May Be Addressed by History Day

Social Studies

6th grade

- 6.H.1: Use historical thinking to understand the emergence, expansion and decline of civilizations, societies and regions over time.
- 6.H.1.1 Construct charts, graphs and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues over time.
- 6.H.1.2 Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 6.H.1.3 Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.

7th grade

- 7.H.1: Use historical thinking to analyze various modern societies.
- 7.H.1.1 Construct charts, graphs, and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues over time.
- 7.H.1.2 Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 7.H.1.3 Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.

8th grade

- 8.H.1: Apply historical thinking to understand the creation and development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.1.1 Construct charts, graphs, and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues.
- 8.H.1.2 Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 8.H.1.3 Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.
- 8.H.1.4 Use historical inquiry to evaluate the validity of sources used to construct historical narratives (e.g. formulate historical questions, gather data from a variety of sources, evaluate and interpret data and support interpretations with historical evidence).
- 8.H.1.5 Analyze the relationship between historical context and decision-making.

World history

- W.H.H.1: Apply the four interconnected dimensions of historical thinking to the Essential Standards for World History in order to understand the creation and development of societies/civilizations/nations over time.
- WH.H.1.1 Use Chronological thinking to:
1. Identify the structure of a historical narrative or story: (its beginning, middle and end).
 2. Interpret data presented in time lines and create time lines.
- WH.H.1.2 Use Historical Comprehension to:
1. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
 2. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
 3. Analyze data in historical maps.
 4. Analyze visual, literary and musical sources.
- WH.H.1.3 Use Historical Analysis and Interpretation to:
1. Identify issues and problems in the past.
 2. Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past.
 3. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causations.
 4. Evaluate competing historical narratives and debates among historians.
 5. Evaluate the influence of the past on contemporary issues.
- WH.H.1.4 Use Historical Research to:
1. Formulate historical questions.
 2. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.

3. Support interpretations with historical evidence.
4. Construct analytical essays using historical evidence to support arguments.

American history

AH1.H.1: Apply the four interconnected dimensions of historical thinking to the American History Essential Standards in order to understand the creation and development of the United States over time.

AH1.H.1.1

Use Chronological thinking to:

1. Identify the structure of a historical narrative or story: (its beginning, middle and end).
2. Interpret data presented in time lines and create time lines.

AH1.H.1.2

Use Historical Comprehension to:

1. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
2. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
3. Analyze data in historical maps.
4. Analyze visual,

AH2.H.1:

Apply the four interconnected dimensions of historical thinking to the American History Essential Standards in order to understand the creation and development of the United States over time.

AH2.H.1.1

Use Chronological thinking to:

1. Identify the structure of a historical narrative or story: (its beginning, middle and end)
2. Interpret data presented in timelines and create timelines.

AH2.H.1.2

Use Historical Comprehension to:

1. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
2. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
3. Analyze data in historical maps.
4. Analyze visual, literary and musical sources.

AH2.H.1.3

Use Historical Analysis and Interpretation to:

1. Identify issues and problems of the past.
2. Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples of the past.
3. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation.
4. Evaluate competing historical narratives and debates among historians.
5. Evaluate the influence of the past on contemporary issues.

AH2.H.1.4

Use Historical Research to:

1. Formulate historical questions.
2. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.
3. Support interpretations with historical evidence.
4. Construct analytical essays using historical evidence to support arguments.

English Language Arts

For All Grades

CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inference from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCRA.R.8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
CCRA.R.9	Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
CCRA.W.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
CCRA.W.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
CCRA.W.8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
CCRA.W.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Information and Technology Essential Standards

For Grades 6-8

6.SI.1	Analyze resources to determine their reliability, point of view, bias, and relevance for particular topics and purposes.
6.TT.1	Use technology and other resources for the purpose of accessing, organizing, and sharing information.
6.RP.1	Apply a research process for collaborative or individual research.
7.SI.1	Evaluate information resources based on specified criteria.
7.RP.1	Apply a research process to complete given tasks.
7.SE.1	Apply responsible behaviors when using information and technology resources.
8.SI.1	Evaluate information resources based on specified criteria.
8.TT.1	Use technology and other resources for assigned tasks.
8.RP.1	Apply a research process to complete project-based activities.

For Grades 9-12

HS.SI.1.1	Evaluate resources for reliability.
HS.SI.1.2	Evaluate resources for point of view, bias, values, or intent of information.
HS.TT.1	Use technology and other resources for assigned tasks.
HS.TT.1.1	Use appropriate technology tools and other resources to access information (multi-database search engines, online primary resources, virtual interviews with content experts).
HS.TT.1.3	Use appropriate technology tools and other resources to design products to share information with others (e.g. multimedia presentations, Web 2.0 tools, graphics, podcasts, and audio files).

Arts Education: Theater Arts

For all levels (6, 7, 8, B, I, P)

C.1	Use movement, voice, and writing to communicate ideas and feelings.
C.2	Use performance to communicate ideas and feelings.
AE.1	Understand how to design technical theatre components, such as costumes, sets, props, makeup, lighting, and sound